A

DISCOURSE

OF

ENTHUSIASM,

Deliver'd in a

Viſitation-Sermon,

AT

GUILFORD,

On *Wedneſday* in *Whitſon*-Week.

By *WILLIAM WHITFELD*,
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LONDON,

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ERRATA *in the First Sermon, occasioned by the Absence of the Author.*

Correct False Pointing and unnecessary Parentheses.

PAge 1. Text, r. 1 St. *John.* P. 5. l 6. r. *from* such Evidences. P. 11. l. 24. r. in Præf. ad *Is.* P. 12. l. 9. r. *Apostles.* l. 22. r. Ecstatick *Fervor.* l. 26. r. *Inform.* P. 14. l. 7. r. *astray.* P. 15. l. 13. r. in the Flesh *of Man and Nature of God.* P. 18. l. 35. r. *as it* was long since f. *what.* P. 20. l. 31. r. *esteemed.* P. 21. l. 27. r. *our* own Souls f. *their own.* P. 22. l. 17. r. *give* f. *gives.*

A SERMON.

St. John, Chap. IV. Verſe 1.

Beloved believe not every Spirit; but try the Spirits whether they are of God: Becauſe many falſe Prophets are gone out into the World.

IT was ordain'd by the Allwiſe Providence of God, that the Church of Chriſt ſhould receive its complete Eſtabliſhment from the Power and Guidance of the Holy Ghoſt, which (as on this time) were pour'd out in a moſt extraordinary Meaſure upon the Apoſtles. And from the firſt Ages of Chriſtianity, a Foundation hath been laid for many ſoul Errors, in a pretence and ſemblance of a like Authority from the Holy Spirit; through which the Body of Chriſt hath been miſerably divided, and the Adminiſtrations and Doctrines (conſtituted and ſettled by the Spirit which led into all Truth,) have been oppoſed and corrupted by the Contradictions of this other Spirit, preſuming upon the ſame Power from God.

Now if there ſhall be any ſuch Perſons unto whom it hath pleas'd God to communicate his Holy Spirit in as great a degree, and to as important an end, as he did to the Apo-

ſtles of Chriſt, Theſe certainly are the beſt qualified to declare his Will, and have a Right to be the *only* Inſtructors of Mankind; but if this ſhall prove to be a counterfeit Title, how great is the Blaſphemy againſt the Holy Ghoſt! Or if it be a miſtaken Preſumption, how ſtrong is that Error which is grounded upon a Perſuaſion, that it is dictated by a Spirit who cannot err! But (whether miſtaken or counterfeit) it is of moſt pernicious Conſequence to the Church of God, and a dangerous Temptation to the Souls of Men.

For Errors of this Nature are not ſo harmleſs and indifferent, as ſome Men are pleas'd to repreſent them: This Warning in my Text is not unneceſſary, nor the frequent Admonitions of our Bleſſed Saviour in vain, to beware of Falſe Prophets: It was for ſome weighty End, that the diſcerning of Spirits was coeval in the Church with the other Gifts of the Holy Ghoſt; and to ſome wiſe purpoſe, that St. *Paul* gave that Charge to the Governors of the Church of *Epheſus*, to take heed to themſelves, and to the Flock of Chriſt; *For I know* (ſays he) *that after my departure, grievous Wolves ſhall enter in among you, not ſparing the Flock of Chriſt.*

Theſe early, and often-repeted Cautions, do ſpeak danger; they admoniſh of falſe Guides unſafe to follow, and call upon us as Chriſtians, to ſhew forth the Charity and Love of the Goſpel in Meekneſs and Tenderneſs, with hearty Endeavours to reclaim Men from Errors which may endanger their Salvation: But in a very diſtinguiſhing manner, my Reverend Brethren, are they paſſionately addreſſed to all that are Miniſters of the Goſpel of Jeſus Chriſt; beſeeching us as faithful Shepherds to feed the Flock of Chriſt, warning us to defend them from ravenous Wolves which come in Sheeps-Cloathing, and from Robbers that enter not by the Door into the Sheepfold; and (if there ſhall be any ſuch) commanding us as *careful Watchmen, to lift up our Voice like a Trumpet, and to ſhew the People their Tranſgreſſions.*

Which

Which that we may do, I will endeavour in my following Diſcourſe,

I. To examine into the ſeveral Pretences, which may be made to this extraordinary Reſidence of God's Holy Spirit.

II. I will lay down one general Rule by which we may try the Spirits whether they are of God.

III. I will ſhew what a Meaſure of God's Holy Spirit (as we may humbly preſume) is a neceſſary and ſufficient Qualification for the Miniſtry of the Goſpel.

I. To examine into the ſeveral Pretences, which may be made to this extraordinary Reſidence of God's Holy Spirit.

And to do this (amongſt ſeveral other Warrants from Scripture,) my Text gives me full Commiſſion; which ſays, *that many falſe Prophets are gone out into the World.* If there are *falſe* Teachers, it concerns us much to enquire ſeriouſly which are the true; and if *many* were gone out ſo early, we may well ſuppoſe their Numbers to be enlarged, and their Errors to be increas'd at this diſtance of time, and our ſelves conſequently to be under great Obligations to make a ſtricter Trial.

In order to which, let us examine,

1. How far we are to believe their Pretences, who lay their Claim *peremptorily* to a moſt extraordinary Meaſure and Reſidence of God's Holy Spirit.

2. What the Title may be, which is grounded upon a Suppoſition of Miracles.

3. What the Claim is from Enthuſiaſm.

As to the firſt; We may juſtly affirm againſt all that ſhall lay their Claim peremptorily to theſe Gifts of the Holy Ghoſt, that no Man whatſoever is to be believ'd in a Matter of this great Conſequence, meerly upon his own Authority. No wiſe Man will ſuffer his Aſſent to be exacted thus from him in things of common Account; and how much leſs ought we to be unwarily wrought up into a Belief in the Cauſe of Religion! Our Faith indeed in all immediate Revelations from God is neceſſary, but not ſo our Belief in the Word of any Man; which (altho' it ſhould be ſent from God, yet) cannot require our Faith, without appealing firſt to our Reaſon with ſufficient Proofs to convince the Judgment, and to evidence the Truth of the Allegation.

And therefore, where it hath pleas'd God to ſend any into the World with an extraordinary Embaſſy from himſelf, he hath always ſet ſome Mark of Power upon thoſe his Servants, by which they and their Miſſion might be known; as may be inſtanced in all them who have hitherto come to declare the Will of God to Mankind: Whether their Commiſſion was to admoniſh his People of ſomething which had been already commanded (as the Prophets of the Old Teſtament;), or whether their Errand were to proclaim ſome new unknown thing to the World, about which God's Will had not been revealed, as the Apoſtles, and all the firſt Preachers of the Chriſtian Religion in the early Ages of the Church: All which, came prepar'd either with Signs and Wonders, or with Prophecies and Gifts, by which they were enabled to give a demonſtration of their being ſent from God, before ever they requir'd a Belief of that which they were to declare in his Name.

And ſince we know no other way of God's Will being communicated to us, but by the Mediation of our *Natural* Faculties, (neither to the Prophet from *God*, nor from *Him*

Him to other *Men*,) it cannot be expected, but that we ſhould make uſe of the ſame Powers to judge of the Inſpiration it ſelf: For how ſupernaturally ſoever the Viſion or Revelation may come upon the Perſon inſpired, yet he has no other means to be aſcertain'd that it is from *God*, but upon a Proof ariſing upon ſuch Evidences, as may convince his Judgment after due Application and examining into them; either by the Teſtimony of external viſible Signs preſented to the Sence, or by the Energy of ſome vigorous Impreſſions upon the Mind, appealing to his Reaſon for the Certainty of the Revelation: So that when the *Prophet* himſelf *cannot*, (without the Aſſiſtance of his Sence and Reaſon,) judge whether the Inſpiration comes from *God*, how much rather ought we to call in the ſame Aids, in examining and deliberating of the ſame thing, when it ſhall be offer'd unto *us* from Man?

A Warrant we have for *this Scrutiny*, from the Miſſion of *Moſes* and Jeſus Chriſt, (the Two *greateſt* Prophets which have been ſent from God:) When *Moſes* was call'd from *Jethro's* Flock to be a Leader of the Children of *Iſrael*, he debated much about his Miſſion, and queſtion'd and argu'd with God, how he ſhould make it *evident* that he was ſent by Him: Upon which God reveals unto him his incommunicable Name [**I am that I am.**] But when *Moſes doubted ſtill* [and *anſwer'd and ſaid*; *but behold they will not believe me, nor hearken unto my Voice; for they will ſay that the Lord hath not appear'd unto Thee.*] God then gives him the Power of working a ſtrange Miracle, by turning his Rod into a Serpent, and by making his hand leprous, and reſtoring it afterwards to ſound Fleſh.---And this Power, God tells him *was* given, *that they might believe that the Lord God of their Fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Iſaac, and the God of Jacob, had appear'd unto him*, Exod. 4.

As for our Bleſſed Saviour, he tells the Jews, *If I bear witneſs to my ſelf, my witneſs is not true; the Works, which my*

my Father hath given me to finiſh, the ſame Works that I do, bear witneſs of me, that the Father hath ſent me. So hath it pleas'd Almighty God to communicate his Will unto Reaſonable Creatures, not without appealing firſt unto their Judgments, by His great Works wrought by his Servants; for without having firſt given ſufficient Grounds for Belief, Juſtice cannot condemn for disbelieving. Now let ev'ry Perſon, who pretends to a particular *Commiſſion* from *God*, (unleſs he comes with a *greater* Character than the Prophets, Apoſtles, and Jeſus Chriſt,) let *him* produce the *ſame* Credentials, if he deſires to be believ'd; for without *theſe Signs*, even the Son of God himſelf would not *force* a Faith upon Reaſonable Men.

2. But ſome may ſay, that *They* have this ſupernatural Evidence of the Spirit of God reſiding upon *their* Teacher in a moſt extraordinary manner, which manifeſts it ſelf by *powerful* Workings in Him, and in *miraculous* Effects upon others.

However, this cannot be ſuppos'd to be a *common* Caſe; for we muſt conſider, that the Preſence of the Holy Spirit in *this* degree, is a moſt ſolemn and ſacred Gift; and not beſtow'd upon any to play Tricks with, (as Stories in the Popiſh Legends would make us believe.) 'Tis the good Grace of God, that we have the Aſſiſtances of his Holy Spirit proportion'd to our *Wants*; but 'tis great Impiety to imagine, that we may have them to ſerve our Ambition and Wantonneſs. And therefore it was our *Saviour's* Obſervation, that it is an evil and adulterous Generation which ſeeketh after Signs; and it may be our *own*, that the Times of the greateſt Ignorance and Superſtition have always afforded the beſt Mart for theſe Miracles: all which have vaniſh'd before the clear Light of the Holy Scriptures; no *other* Conviction being now neceſſary, than that which the Goſpel of Jeſus Chriſt (conſtantly preach'd and truly expounded) brings to the Minds of all true Believers; which

which ſuperſedes the pretence of theſe Miracles being from *God*; and ſhews us likewiſe, that the Son of Man came to deſtroy the Works of the Devil; by which the Power of *Darkneſs alſo*, is ſo far ſubdued, that the Deceptions of Satan can neither be ſo common nor open as heretofore. So that however ſtrange the *Appearances* may be (upon which *this* Pretence is grounded) we have great Reaſon either to ſuſpect their *Truth*, or to look upon them as the unknown Effects of ſome *Natural* Cauſes, rather than to believe them either *Miracles* from *God*, or *Deluſions* from the *Devil*.

But, allowing theſe Works to be true and real; that is, without Deceit in him that profeſſeth to do them, and above the Capacity of the Beholders to comprehend the Cauſe of them; yet we are not preſently to give up our Faith unto every one that can work a *ſtrange* thing. For that this Power is not from *God*, we have *All* reaſon to doubt: but how far it may be permitted to the *Devil*, to produce prodigious Effects, (either by *exceeding* or by going *beſides* the common Courſe of Nature) we cannot take upon *us* to determine; becauſe we neither know how large that Sphere is, in which Spirits act; nor, how far the Malice and Subtilty of that bold Spirit (which durſt attack the ever-bleſſed Son of God) may be ſuffered to deceive us: Nor, *Laſtly*, how far it may pleaſe God to lengthen out his Chain, and for our Iniquities, to give us up to his Buffetings.

This is certain, that there have been ſuch Deluſions from an *Infernal* Power, and *Diabolical* Spirit, and may *poſſibly* be ſo again; tho' 'tis a ſad Omen of the declining Power of the Goſpel where they prevail much: It is certain likewiſe, that *whatever* this Power of the Devil is, 'tis given unto him from *God*, either as a Tryal of our *Faith*, or as a Judgment for our *Sins*: upon which account, Sorcerers, Magicians, and Falſe Prophets have been in moſt Ages of the Church, and have deceiv'd many. We read

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of no fewer than 400 False Prophets at *one* Time, into *whose Mouths the Lord had put a Lying Spirit, that they might deceive* Ahab *to his destruction*, 1 Kings 22. And in the *Acts* we read of *Simon* the Magician, *who had bewitch'd the People of* Samaria, *and that to him they had regard, saying, (from the Lowest to the Greatest) that this Man was the* **Great Power** *of God, because for a long time he had bewitched them with his Sorceries*, Acts 8.

Now, this we have reason to believe is permitted by God. 1. Either as a Tryal of the Faithful, as God tells the *Jews*, *Deut.* 13. that *tho' the Sign or Wonder did come to pass which the False Prophet foretold, yet that they were not to hearken to his Words: For the Lord your God proveth you by this, to know whether you love the Lord your God with all your Heart, and with all your Soul.* Or else, 2. It is the last Punishment of the Wicked in *this* World, in order to their *Eternal* destruction in the next: For St. *Paul* speaking of this *Simon Magus*, says, that as for *him, his coming was after the working of Satan, with all Power, and Signs, and Lying Wonders.* And as for his *Followers*, that for their *Wickedness, God should send them strong Delusions that they should believe a Lye, that they all might be damn'd*, 2 Thess. 2. which shows, that a very great Power of doing many strange things *may* be from the *Devil*, and that (for their Sins) Men may be so far given over by God, as to believe his Delusions.

3. But (blessed be God!) these Pretences are neither so common (nor so *real*) that we need have recourse to *this* Cause for their Solution. And if a strong and violent Enthusiasm does sometimes produce surprising Effects, yet I question not but that (even in the highest degrees of it) it may be attributed to other Causes.

By

By Enthuſiaſm, I underſtand a ſtrong Fervency or Pregnancy of the Soul, Spirits or Brain, which does really and truly produce ſtrange Effects, that are often miſtaken to be *ſupernatural*. And *this* Impulſe is *no where* more powerful upon the Minds of weak and diſtemper'd Men, than in their Contemplations of Religion; which, by abſtracting the Thoughts from *Material* Objects, and fixing them intenſely upon the Meditation of Divine Myſteries, draw the Soul, as it were, into a *cloſe* Retirement within it ſelf, and carry it (in a manner) *out* of the Body, ſetting it at a diſtance from the outward Senſes; which kind of *Trance*, we may obſerve (in a *lower* degree) to be frequent in Contemplative and Melancholy Perſons, who ſuffer often this ſort of Alienation of Mind, that they neither ſee nor hear any thing done before them.

Now, as ſome Men by a *Natural* Indiſpoſition of Body, and diſorder of the Humours, are more *readily* inclin'd to theſe Ecſtacies; ſo is it poſſible, that *others* may *Artificially* improve their Tempers very much into them. And then (in theſe Trances) what *Viſions* may they not ſee! What *Revelations* may they not hear! And if theſe Raptures ſhall be accompanied with *Words*, how *vehement* may they be in themſelves! and how *tranſporting* in the Affections of their Hearers! Doubtleſs, ſtrange things may be done this way *naturally*; barely by the Effects of a Diſeaſe, or by the Power of ſome ſounds, in which an Itching Ear may be extravagantly delighted; inſomuch, that when a Man is diſpos'd *readily* to meet them, and *prepar'd* to receive their Influence, 'tis Inconceivable what Tumults and Diſorders they may raiſe in his Soul.

I would not be miſtaken to have ſpoken *lightly* of ſpiritual Gifts, or to have detracted from that Divine Illumination, by which God imparts his Holy Spirit, and communicates himſelf intimately to truly Pious Souls. There are Good Men doubtleſs (whoſe Vertues we ought to admire, and endeavour to imitate) who by their Holineſs of Life

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have rais'd themſelves high in God's Favour, and enjoy the ſweet and comfortable Fellowſhip of his bleſſed Spirit, in *Sobriety*, to the great advantage of others: And tho' there ſhould be *Abuſes* found, yet the Subject is too *Sacred* to be treated with lightneſs and ſcoffing. Nevertheleſs it is plain, that this matter *may* be miſtaken, and is (I fear) not ſeldom Counterfeited; and in both Caſes it proves a moſt dangerous Impoſture.

For (at the beſt) Enthuſiaſm is a *groſs* and moſt pernicious Error in Religion: It is incredible to what Deceptions a Man lays himſelf open, who thinks it a great *Spiritual* Attainment, to have his *Reaſon* mightily diſturb'd, and himſelf poſſeſs'd with unuſual Agitations of Mind, in order to receive Divine Influences. Whereas, the reſemblance of God's Holy *Spirit* appears no where more *brightly* in us, than in Calm undiſturb'd Reaſon; God's *own* Image being the Pattern after which the Rational Soul was created in this Frame. It muſt be the *Heart which is fix'd, and ſet aright*, that makes the *neareſt* approaches unto Heaven; but whatever throws the Faculties of the Mind into *diſorder*, and drives it furiouſly from a quiet Poſſeſſion of right Reaſon, can never produce any ſimilitude of God's Holy Spirit in the Soul of Man; which then only bears the trueſt likeneſs to its high Original, when it is in the beſt Eſtate of Tranquility and Sedateneſs, as it was in *Adam* before his Fall, and in our bleſſed Saviour all his Life.

This Reflection in general, may ſerve to make ſome diſcrimination between the Effects of God's Spirit, and of Enthuſiaſm: For if, of the one; they may be obſerved to be boiſterous and fierce, tranſporting the Judgment, diſordering all the Faculties of the Soul, and enraging as New Wine; if the Fruits of the other Recorded in the Goſpel, are Meekneſs, Gentleneſs, and Humility; if its Convictions upon good and Holy Men have been as the Dew falling upon a Fleece of Wool; and its Illuminations as the ſilent Ray, piercing and enlightning powerfully, but without noiſe;

noiſe; Theſe different Effects (and conſequently the contrary Principle from which they proceed) may be readily diſtinguiſh'd.

Let us view an Humble and Holy Man, compos'd in his Religion, and ſervent; but ſober, in his Devotions; one full of Charity and good Works, Upright and Juſt; Good-natur'd, Meek, and Merciful; and from thence let us turn our Eyes upon the furious Enthuſiaſt, Raging and Turbulent, and Damning moſt of Mankind; Rigid, Implacable, and Unmerciful to all, not of his own Sect; and we may eaſily diſcern which of theſe two doth the moſt reſemble the Pure, Peaceable, and Almerciful Spirit of God.

Now, as for the Examples of the Old Prophets (brought often to juſtifie theſe Enthuſiaſtick Tranſports) this may ſuffice to ſhew their difference in ſhort (which I have hinted at before:) That tho' the Spirit of true Prophecy may ſeem to have been Ecſtatical in ſome Inſtances, yet it work'd only upon the Animal Part with ſuch violence, but never diſpoſſeſt the Prophet of his Reaſon: He was acted indeed by a Spirit more potent than his own; but this Spirit maintain'd a clearneſs and conſiſtency of Reaſon, and ſtrength and ſolidity of Judgment, and did not raviſh the Mind, but inform and enlighten it: Upon which account St. *Jerom* (*In Præf. ad It.*) objects, that abreption of Mind, which is proper to Enthuſiaſm, unto the *Montaniſts*, as an Indication of the Falſity of their Spirit. And St. *Chryſoſtom* ſtates this difference betwixt the Spirit of true Prophecy and of Enthuſiaſm. "'Tis the Property (ſays he) of a Diviner "to be Ecſtatical, to undergo a great Violence, and to "be toſs'd and hurried about like a Madman: But not "ſo the Prophet, who is with his Underſtanding awake, "and his Mind in a ſober and orderly Temper; and "in all he ſpeaks he knows what he ſaith, 29 *Hom. in* 1 *Ep. ad Cor.*

However, they know not what Spirit they are of, who think that the Spirit of the Goſpel of Jeſus Chriſt is the ſame with that of *Elias*; It is not Rage and Revenge, but Meekneſs and Charity that are the Effects of it; not Arts to poſſeſs themſelves with Fury, and to tranſport the Affections of others; but Simplicity and Plainneſs to manifeſt the Integrity of the Preacher, and to inform the Underſtanding of the Hearer. And accordingly we ſee, that altho' the Apoſtle had the moſt plentiful Effuſions of the Spirit of God, yet they ſpoke the words of Soberneſs; and that no one of their Converts was ever made Mad by them; tho' ſome of them were naturally Eloquent, and all had the Gift of Tongues; yet St. *Paul* diſclaims wholly all Artifices of Excellency of Speech, and the Power of enticing Words, ſhowing, that the ſtrength of the Goſpel was to conſiſt in the Power of God, and not in the Wiſdom of Men; and well knowing, that whatever preſent Influence and Agitation a ready and vehement flow of Words may raiſe in the Paſſions, yet the Convictions of the Judgment from calm Reaſon, plainly deliver'd, are more durable, being laid upon a Foundation which will laſt upon the Mind, when the Paſſions are allay'ed, and this ecſtatick Power extinguiſh'd.

No Crafts therefore of a forc'd and counterfeit Enthuſiaſm (being far diſtant from Sincerity and good Reaſon) are proper Inſtruments either to inforce the Judgment, or to propagate the Faith of the eternal Truths of the Goſpel: And even when it ſhall be real, thoſe Diſeaſes of the Body, which contribute moſt to a ſickneſs of the Brain, and raging of the Fancy, may not improperly be ſaid to produce it: Inſomuch, that Enthuſiaſm is ſo far from the Spirit of God, that it is a Diſtemper of Mind next to Madneſs. And if the Obſervations of ſome Judicious Men be true, that the Enthuſiaſms of the Ancient Poets did very much advance their Idolatry, who deliver'd down the Heatheniſh Religion, dreſs'd up with ſuch kind of Inſpirations and familiar

miliar Converſes with their Gods (by which they drew Men inſenſibly from the uſe of their right Reaſon, and employ'd their Minds upon *Muſing*, and expecting ſtrange Viſions and Raptures): I pray God that we may not be *ſadly* ſenſible of the ill Effects it may have amongſt us! by drawing Men away from a judicious Survey of the *Goſpel* into a ſpeculation of *ſomething* which they fancy more Sublime, Viſionary, and Spiritual; and by making them at the laſt deny *real* Truths, and renounce their Lord and Saviour Jeſus Chriſt. It is evident, that Enthuſiaſm hath produc'd theſe Effects in *ſome* Men, and that where-ever it goes, it takes ſomewhat alike Steps: It is true likewiſe, that the introducing of the *Goſpel* into the World, was by beating down of theſe Enthuſiaſms and private Inſpirations, and by advancing the true uſe of right Reaſon: For the performance of which Task, the Wiſdom of *Socrates* is ſo deſervedly admir'd by ſome of the Ancient Fathers, who reduc'd the Age he liv'd in, out of this hot-brain'd Ecſtatical Temper, and by plain Truths and ſound Morality, prepar'd Mens Minds for the receiving of Chriſtianity.

All that I ſhall farther obſerve of *this* Enthuſiaſm, (be it *Real* or be it *Pretended*) is, that many great and ſpreading Deceits have prevail'd in the World, by the help of this Craft, and from the Maſters of it. It has not only been a Friend to the Idolatry and Infidelity of *old* Times, but to *Mahometiſm*, and to *Jeſuitiſm* (the worſt ſort of Bigotry and Superſtition in theſe latter Ages.) *Mahomet* knew very well what uſe to make of his *Epileptick* Fits, and what Authority, Veneration, and Sanctity, Viſions, Revelations, and an intimate Commerce with the Spirit of God, would gain him amongſt the Ignorant and Superſtitious. Nor can we ſuppoſe *Ignatius Loyola* to be unskill'd in this Art, when the Hiſtorian *Maffeius* (among other ſtrange Relations in his Life) tells us, that his Ardor and Fervency at his Devotions were ſo *very* great, that in his Praying, he was often liſted from the Ground almoſt four Cubits high; the

the *Spirit* all the while bearing up the weight of his *Body*. And the Life of *Sister Catharine of Jesus*, will afford us many more such Prodigies of Visions, Ecstacies, Raptures, and Revelations.

Now, what hath been said upon this Subject, will be sufficient to satisfie a serious Man, that there is great Danger of being led away from the Truth by these Pretences. He that considers *soberly*, that no less than his Eternal Salvation is a stake, will think himself oblig'd to examine well, and to try whether the Spirits are from God. And, if any thing shall happen surprizing or *seemingly* Miraculous, he will *reflect*, what Power the Devil is sometimes permitted to shew by *his* Missionaries, and what Delusions some Men themselves have been under, from Natural Distempers of the Body; which will teach him, not to attribute every thing to God's *Holy Spirit*, which he sees or hears *uncommon* in a Man: Whether it be a violent Heat and Ecstatick Fervency in Prayer: If 'tis *possible* that these *may* be a cover and pretence for devouring Widows Houses; or whether it be an *unnatural* vehemency in Speech, with strange Emotions and Convulsions in bringing it forth; if a Fever or Phrensie can loosen the Tongue in a like manner, and open its way to the same tumultuary Utterance: In short, whether it be Vision or Revelation, Prophecies, Inward Light, or whatever else we may think strange and unusual. In all these (because 'tis *possible* we may be deceiv'd, because we are forewarn'd, and because 'tis a case of the most *serious* concern to us) we ought therefore not to be hasty in giving them the Name of the Gifts of the Holy and ever-blessed Spirit of God, but rather suspend our Belief, until we have a more sure Evidence that they do really proceed from thence. Which brings me to my Second Particular.

II. To

II. To lay down one general Rule, by which we may try the Spirits, whether they are of God.

St. *John* lays down one Rule in the Verſe following my Text, *Hereby we know the Spirit of God; every Spirit that confeſſeth that Jeſus Chriſt is come in the Fleſh, is of God*, which will continue (as long as this Goſpel doth) to be a ſtanding Argument againſt the Spirit of thoſe Men amongſt us, who pretend the moſt to the Sacred Impulſes of the Holy Ghoſt, and yet deny the *Humanity* of their Bleſſed Saviour.

But *this*, muſt not be underſtood as a *General* Teſt, it being deſign'd to prove a *particular* ſort of Hereticks (ſuch as *Cerinthus* and *Ebion*) who diſputed againſt the Coming of our Saviour in the Fleſh. However, we may reaſonably conclude from hence, that (in like manner) the denying of any Article in the Chriſtian Faith (or any Goſpel-Doctrine) will continue to be a Mark in all Ages of the Church, to diſtinguiſh Falſe Teachers by.

For theſe Doctrines were eſtabliſh'd at firſt by innumerable Miracles of Chriſt and his Apoſtles, and of all the Primitive Preachers of the Goſpel: And they were confirm'd afterwards by (that which is rather a greater Teſtimony than all theſe Miracles) the unanimous Conſent and Faith of the whole Chriſtian World; who (not giving up their aſſent blindly, nor admitting any part of the New Teſtament without much Controverſie) have left to all ſucceeding Ages an undeniable Argument of its Truth; In that their Differences argued them impartial Searchers, and their wonderful Concurrence afterwards in receiving the preſent Canon of Holy Writ, demonſtrates them to be true Believers of all its Doctrines, and upon good Ground to be ſo; which ſhews the reaſonableneſs of that Axiom laid down by *Vincentius*, "That that which was believed "every where, always, and by all Members of the Catho-

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" lick Church, is the true Catholick Faith, and gives us Warrant to aſſert, that the Contradicting of any of theſe Articles or Doctrines, will at this Day likewiſe argue Error in the Chriſtian Religion, and a falſe Pretence to the Spirit of God.

For none of theſe Articles of the Chriſtian Faith (believ'd by all, and at all times) not any of theſe Doctrines of the Goſpel (thus atteſted by Clouds of Witneſſes, and an infinite number of Miracles) may now be rejected at any Man's Pleaſure, or by the impulſe of any private Spirit, without the loſs of the true Faith; nor are they to be overthrown either upon the appearance, or upon the Reality of Miracles of leſs Number and Weight; nor to be left for the ſake of any Party of Men, how numerous ſoever their Followers may be, or how great ſoever their own Excellencies: And there can be no Reaſon now produc'd of ſo great Authority for the forſaking of theſe Doctrines, as that Power is by which they have been eſtabliſh'd and confirm'd.

This Rule of Faith therefore ſtands firm and inviolable againſt all Oppoſers whatſoever: Concerning ſome of which *Vincentius* ſaith very appoſitely to our preſent Times, " That there are Men who dare to Teach and Promiſe, that " in their Church, that is, (ſays he) in the Conventicle of " their Communion, there is a great and ſpecial, and plain- " ly a kind of Perſonal Grace of God, and Reſidence of his " Holy Spirit; inſomuch, that without any Labour, with- " out any Study or Induſtry, whoſoever are of their num- " ber ſhall be Divinely Inſpired; by which (ſaith he) He- " reticks are wont in a wonderful manner to deceive many. *Cap.* 26.

But notwithſtanding theſe Pretences, otherwiſe hath been the Sentence of the Church, as may be witneſſed in *Arrius*, *Montanus*, *Neſtorius*, *Photinus*, *Apollinaris*, *Origen*, *Tertullian*, and many others, who ſtand at this day condemn'd by it: *Men* (eſpecially the two laſt, as *Vincentius* ſaith, *Cap.* 23, 24.) of wonderful Abilities and Holy Lives, who

who had been ſtrong Champions of the Chriſtian Faith in moſt of its Doctrines; but being unſound in ſome one, or more Particulars, became a great Temptation to the People of God, by reaſon of their known Worth and high Character.

Nevertheleſs, neither could their *former* Merits excuſe them for their *preſent* Errors, nor their Orthodoxy in the main, defend them from Cenſure in any one rotten Principle. And if *We* proceed by the ſame Rule, *We* may know ſome at this day, if they deny the Sacraments inſtituted by our Saviour, and all Goſpel-Ordinances; others, if they deny Inſant-Baptiſm; others, if they deny the *Divinity* of Chriſt; which Doctrines (if warranted by the Word of God, and by the continual Conſent of all Chriſtians) are ſo many unerring Marks upon thoſe that deny them, that they have not the Spirit of God.

For this Holy Spirit leads into all Truth, and cannot be repugnant to it ſelf: It is by this Power and Wiſdom that theſe Doctrines have been eſtabliſhed in the Goſpels of Jeſus Chriſt; that therefore cannot proceed from the Spirit of God by which any of them ſhall be oppoſed: And the Scripture being inſpired by God (as we Chriſtians conſent) we may moſt juſtly ſet up the Doctrines contain'd in them for a Teſt of all the Claims made to his Holy Spirit; and either as they agree or diſagree with that which is there revealed, pronounce them either true or falſe.

To this purpoſe it is, that we are caution'd by St. *Paul*, *that tho' we our ſelves* (ſaith the Apoſtle) *or an Angel from Heaven, preach any other Goſpel, than that which we have preach'd unto you, let him be accurſed!* Gal. 1. This wholly excludes all pretended new Commiſſions from God in ought contrary to the Scripture; and for what is there confirm'd, they are ſuperfluous: This determines likewiſe the Canon of our Faith, by ſhewing the *Standard*, unto which all Doctrines are to be reduc'd: From whence we may conclude, that neither Men, (Holy and Upright, and

Orthodox in the greateſt part of the Chriſtian Faith,) nor Apoſtle, nor Angel from Heaven, are now to be believ'd peremptorily in their preaching a *New* Doctrine, or in their rejecting an *Old* one; as alſo that no Perſon whaſoever, can prove the Truth of his Doctrine, and of having the Spirit of God, by his *Miracles*; but that on the contrary, his Spirit and Miracles are to be prov'd by the Soundneſs and Congruity of his Doctrine, and That to ſtand the Trial of the Goſpel of Jeſus Chriſt.

There are likewiſe other Marks, by which the Spirit of God is to be known in them upon whom it ſhall be ſaid to reſide: Are *they* meek and humble as their Lord and Saviour? Have *they* that Goodneſs and Univerſal Charity, which may manifeſt *their* Spirit to be the Spirit of *God, who is the Father of Infinite Mercies, and the God of all long ſuffering*? Does *their* Wiſdom ſhew it ſelf to be from *above*, [*by being pure and peaceable? Gentle, and eaſie to be entreated? Full of Mercy, and full of good Works? Without Partiality, and without Hypocriſie?*] *Theſe* are the *Genuine* Fruits of God's Holy Spirit! And I wiſh, (for the Peace of Mankind, and the eternal Welfare of their own Souls,) that *Theſe* were the Marks by which all Chriſtians would endeavour to diſtinguiſh themſelves; and that no one would *dare* to pretend to the Spirit of *God*, and the pure Religion of the *Goſpel*, but Thoſe, who have firſt laid the Foundation of their Holineſs in *Theſe* Vertues: For in theſe alone doth the Holy Spirit of God reſide, and the pure Religion of the Goſpel conſiſt.

It is the want of this which makes us to diſpute ſo much about the Chriſtian Religion, and to practice ſo little. For in moſt things wherein we Proteſtants differ, there is more of the true and pure Religion of the Goſpel of Jeſus Chriſt in not contending at all, than there is in thoſe Matters about which we ſtrive; which Diſputes notwithſtanding, are oftentimes ſo exceeding ſharp, that what was long ſince obſerv'd by an Heathen Author, *Am. Marcel.*

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Wild Beaſts are not ſo ſavage, as Chriſtians differing about Religion. And we enter the Fray not without the loſs of that for which we engage ſo *fiercely*, making Shipwreck of our Faith, by loſing our Charity and Humility, which are the only true Indications of God's Holy Spirit working in us: And all the while, theſe Pretences and Cavils, give too great Occaſion to the Atheiſt to deny God and all Religion.

But to conclude.

I would not be miſtaken, from what I have ſaid, to have argued ought againſt the *Power*, or (as it is commonly objected to us) againſt the *Aſſiſtance* of God's Holy Spirit, as if diſclaim'd wholly by the Miniſtry of this Church; for who then will believe *our* Report? *What* Certainty can *we* have that our Doctrine is true? And that we expound the Word of God aright? We truſt too much, (as our *Adverſaries* tell us,) to the Arm of Fleſh, to Humane Reaſoning, and to *weaker* Humane Learning: And we diſown the Spirit of God in *other* Men, becauſe *we* cannot attain unto it our ſelves; that Holy Spirit which ſhould lead us into all Truth, and without which we cannot ſavour ſpiritual Things aright. Which brings me to my *laſt* Particular, to ſhew in ſhort, what a Meaſure of God's Holy Spirit (as we may humbly preſume) is a neceſſary, and ſufficient Qualification for the Miniſtry of the Goſpel.

III. The reading of the moſt excellent Prayers of our Liturgy, will *fully* anſwer this Objection to any unprejudic'd Perſon, where he may find, how earneſtly we beg Aſſiſtance from Heaven, to render *any* of our Endeavours effectual; and acknowledge, and pray for the Concurrence of God's illuminating Spirit, as *more eſpecially* needful, to ſtrengthen our *weak* Eyes, and to enligh-

ten our darken'd Faculties in the *Great* Work of His Miniſtry.

But *then*, this Illumination is to be underſtood twofold: *Firſt*, as that, which is annex'd to the uſing of the Means; or *ſecondly*, as that, which is ſuppos'd to work without any Means employ'd for the obtaining of it. Now it is the *former* of theſe, in which *we* do place our Confidence: For, ſeeing that the Providence of God doth not operate commonly, but by the Subordination of thoſe Means, which his Wiſdom hath thought fit to preſcribe, we dare not preſume upon the obtaining ſo extraordinary a Bleſſing without the uſing of our own Endeavours; which we do believe, it is *our* part to *perform*, before we can hope for any Meaſure of God's ſpiritual Aſſiſtance: We think, that it is a *moſt* gracious Act of God's Providence, that He hath ſuggeſted unto us *theſe* Means; which *Humane* Induſtry is left to *improve*, and to prepare for his good Bleſſing that is to crown them. And therefore, as we lay no manner of Claim to the *New*, *unlabour'd* Illumination of the Enthuſiaſt; ſo, we do hope, that (by the Bleſſing of God) we may have our Lot and Part in the *Old* Light; that Inſpiration, Aſſiſtance, and Concurrence of God, which are always afforded to the Pious, Humble, and Induſtrious.

Upon which Principle, we do not expect the unlabour'd Gift of Tongues; but we believe it a neceſſary Preparation, (to enable us to expound the Word of God rightly,) that we underſtand in ſome meaſure the Languages in which the Scriptures were originally writ; to which end we read the Ancient Fathers, who may reaſonably be eſteem'ſt the *trueſt* Interpreters of the Apoſtles Writings, to whom they immediately ſucceeded, from whence they underſtood ſeveral Cuſtoms and Idioms of Speech better than any living in after-Ages. With fervent and aſſiduous Prayers (to God for his Divine Aſſiſtance) we do thus employ our Studies faithfully in the Holy Scriptures, not looking

looking *idly* for Prophecies and Revelations from Heaven. And if, by the Bleſſing of God upon theſe (and our like) Endeavours, we gain the Spirit of Wiſdom, the Gift of a ſound Judgment, the Attainments of Learning, and the Vertues of Charity, Humility, and leading a Godly Life, we hope that we may be prepar'd for the farther Illuminations of God's Holy Spirit; of which we do believe, that it hath pleas'd him *already* to give us an *Earneſt*, by this his bleſſing upon our *preſent* Labours, and by theſe Improvements in the Knowledge of his Word, which without his Grace and Spirit we could *not* have attain'd.

Thoſe, whom it ſhall pleaſe God *thus* to prepare for the Preaching of his Goſpel, we truſt (of his Mercy) that He will not be wanting to afford all other neceſſary Aſſiſtances to their devout Prayers, for their expounding his Scripture, and for the declaring his Will; and that *they* may hope for the Reward and Succeſs of painful Labourers, if nothing be wanting in themſelves or Hearers; and that the *People* may *aſſure* themſelves of Salvation under *our* Miniſtry, if by a due Adminiſtration of the Holy Sacraments, we ſhall make them capable of being Partakers of the Merits of Chriſt's Sufferings; If by ſhewing them the *Terrors* of the Lord, we ſhall perſuade Men to an Holy Life; If we admoniſh them of their Errors *faithfully*, and inſtruct them *diligently* in all Goſpel-Duties: We truſt, that our Labours plac'd with *Sincerity* in theſe things, will be effectual for the Salvation of their *own* Souls, and of thoſe committed unto our Charge.

And herein, what other thing I pray appears to be *farther* wanting to complete fully the Paſtoral Care in all thoſe, who being *lawfully* call'd, ſhall *conſcientiouſly* exerciſe the Miniſtry of Jeſus Chriſt? For where theſe Duties ſhall be perform'd in Uprightneſs and Sincerity, and with true Holineſs of Life (tho' we are neither Prophets, nor Healers, nor Workers of Miracles; yet why may we not humbly preſume from theſe Bleſſings (and doubtleſs our Confidence

fidence is not in vain in the Lord) that we have all neceſſary Aſſiſtance and Illumination of God's Holy Spirit, after having employ'd our moſt earneſt Prayers and faithful Endeavours? Without which, we dare not careleſly and negligently throw our ſelves upon Divine Providence in *any* thing; and much leſs dare we boldly and raſhly lay our Claim to the *Holy Ghoſt*: But, after our conſcientious and painful Labours in the Study and Work of the Miniſtry of Jeſus Chriſt, we do hope for the *Guidance* of God's Holy Spirit, and, (where through Humane Frailty we *err*,) for his Pardon.

This is the Reaſon of *our* Hope, who are of this Communion; which will not want a particular Application with the Serious and Unprejudic'd. Let us therefore not be wavering and inconſtant, and toſs'd about with every Wind! Let us be ſober-minded in examining after the Truth! And zealous in the Preſervation of it! God gives us all Grace, to admire the Depth of the Riches of his Knowledge, in preſerving his True Church and Pure Religion amongſt us! God give us an *Underſtanding* to make the right Uſe of theſe Bleſſings! And an Heart never to forſake them!

Now to Thee, O Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, Three Perſons, and One God, be aſcribed all Honour and Glory, &c.

FINIS.

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